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THE BIBLE
AND COMMON SENSE

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GIANT'S STRENGTH

GOING WEST

GRISELDA

IN THE GARDEN OF CHARITY

LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER

THE CITY OF COMRADES

THE HIGH HEART

THE INNER SHRINE

THE LETTER OF THE CONTRACT

THE LIFTED VEIL

THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS

THE STEPS OF HONOR

THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT

THE THREAD OF FLAME

THE WAY HOME

THE WILD OLIVE

THE ABOLISHING OF DEATH

THE CONQUEST OF FEAR

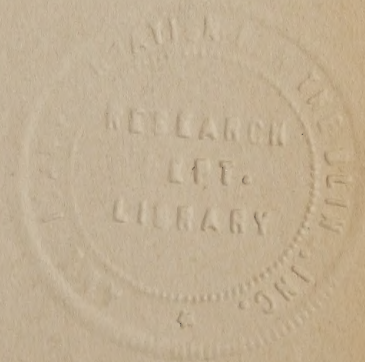
THE BIBLE AND COMMON SENSE

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BY
BASIL KING



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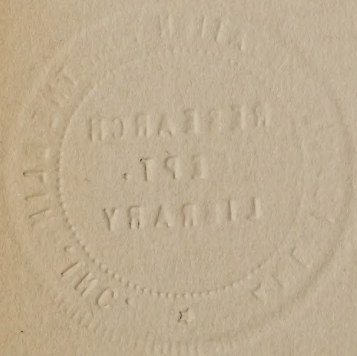
THE BIBLE AND COMMON SENSE

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By Basil King

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I

THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE

CHAPTER I

THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE

I

LET me say at once that in this book there will be neither argument nor homily. The object will not be to teach; still less will it be to convince or to convert. It will go no farther than the stating of the process by which one individual learned to pick his way through the difficulties which attend the reading of the Bible, and to find a small portion of its message.

To those who can do this already this book will be of no value. For those who take their interpretation of the Bible from some authority, probably a church, to which they elect

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to submit themselves, there will also be nothing of interest. There are always, however, people more or less at sea. There are those who cannot get at the Bible across theologies and dogmas. Millions of quite honest souls find the very phrases in which Christians talk about the Bible vulgarized and hackneyed. Such readers as these may be willing to investigate a by-path, when the old historic highways seem intricate and bewildering, or overgrown and choked.

I should apologize more profoundly for the personal tone of these records had I not been asked to write from the personal point of view. After all, experience, however humble, has a value of its own. Academic teaching may be as broad as that of Plato, as deep as that of Paul, and yet the soul's empirical adventure will always have its significance. Even if it makes mistakes, and takes an occasional wrong turn, at least it does so on its

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independent quest. When it comes to the effort to see through conditions admittedly obscure, almost any man's story is worth telling.

But while this book will be neither dogmatic nor theological, it will be indebted to dogmatic theology for much that it contains. As a matter of fact, dogmatic theology has entered into our ways of thinking far more deeply than we commonly suppose. It could hardly be otherwise among a people whose ancestors were steeped in it. It infuses our thought and our language. It is behind our society, our literature, our governments, our laws. We cannot get away from it. That without some of its points of view we should try to understand the Bible is impossible.

It is equally impossible to approach the subject without some guidance from the churches. While I am not of those who believe that the churches produced the Bible—the assertion is often made—yet to a consid-

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erable extent they have been its custodians, especially during those centuries when they stood for the only civilizing force. As I understand the Bible, it belongs not to the churches but to the world; it is not a handbook of religious instruction. but a chronicle of development.

Nevertheless, for the western nations, at any rate, the churches have put their stamp on it. The stamp may vary as the sects vary; but it is not easy for the American reader to see the Bible with no sectarian stamp on it at all. He reads it as a Presbyterian, or a Methodist, or a Roman Catholic, or a Baptist, or an Anglican Bible, as his mind happens to be biased. My own effort is to read it through my personal lens, with as much detachment, independence, and intelligence as I can bring to it. At the same time, in whatever I have to say, the teachings of the Anglican, Roman, and Evangelical bodies, together with the

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writings of Mrs. Eddy, will count for much; though there is something that counts for more.

That is my own judgment. If to the reader this should seem presumptuous, I must remind him that one's own judgment is the ultimate test of all one's opinions, the ultimate standard of all one's acts. One may decide to renounce one's own judgment, as to some extent a monk or a soldier always does, but even that is a case for one's own judgment. No matter how unquestioningly we obey, it is of our own judgment that we do obey. It is of our own judgment that we become lawyers, doctors, politicians, clergymen, atheists, agnostics, Protestants, or Catholics.

Moreover, the individual who seeks a power which will interpret the Bible for his use is always obliged to say, "It gets its authority from me." That is to say, no church can have more authority than the individual ascribes

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to it. The individual must judge the church before the church can judge the individual. Abstractly, a particular church may be a wholly divine institution; but till the individual has indorsed that divinity there is no divinity for him. No church can teach the individual till the individual himself has set it up as a teaching institution. This is true even if he is born into a church which he never questions, and from which he never swerves. His acceptance of its methods, however tacit, rests with his own judgment.

Furthermore, the individual cannot elude the fact that the world is full of authorities, each of which explains the Bible differently from every other, and is therefore always in a minority. As far as I can see, there is no "Catholic" standard in the sense commonly given to the word Catholic, of "what has been taught everywhere, by everyone, and at all times." There has never been any such teach-

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ing. Even among the apostles there were differences of opinion; in the earliest Christian churches there were varieties of procedure. Whether he will or no, the individual is driven to choose between many conflicting witnesses, selecting one, or rejecting all, or co-ordinating several. From the exercise of his private judgment there is no escape. Even when, as is perhaps most frequently the case, he merely flounders in ignorance and helplessness, he flounders of his own free will. The mother who cries, "I am at a loss as to what to teach my children about the Bible," is at that loss because she chooses so to be. It is a matter of the judgment.

For these and similar reasons, I have been obliged, like many others at the present day, to form my own opinions as to what the Bible means. This I have tried to do through what I may call a process of distillation. Accepting gratefully the varying testimonies of the

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historic churches, I have done my best to fuse them, as far as they would blend. I have attempted this for my personal guidance only, keeping close to the dictates of what to me seems common sense.

When I proposed the title "The Bible and Common Sense" as a caption for the series of articles out of which this book has grown, the editor of *Harper's Magazine* objected that he was afraid of it. "I should not like orthodox Christians to think that we were attacking their beliefs." The fear lest orthodox Christians should feel that between common sense and their views of the Scriptures there is some discrepancy, may seem a curious one but it can be justified. To no small degree we have removed the Bible beyond the pale of common sense. We have placed it where it can be read only in a specialized frame of mind. From this frame of mind our every-

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day powers of reasoning must be excluded to begin with.

It is only fair to say that this springs from unauthorized teachers rather than from any official utterance of the churches. The American Christian's conception of the Bible hardly ever goes outside the tradition of the nursery. There he is told the stories of Adam and Eve, of Jacob and Esau, of David and Goliath, with the more idyllic incidents of the New Testament. Except for those who, for professional reasons perhaps, mean to make a deeper study of the Scriptures, Christian education in the United States is confined, as a rule, within this range. Some perfunctory reading may be added, some learning of disjointed passages by rote, a little desultory explanation from a Sunday-school teacher of immature qualifications, if any at all, and the average Christian's biblical instruction is complete. For all the rest of his life he is

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considered sufficiently introduced to the volume which contains the secret of eternal life.

It is not strange that as he grows older he should come to one of two conclusions—either that the Bible is preposterous, or that it must be judged by some process foreign to the human mind in any other of its functions. He may even halt between these opinions. Not venturing to reject it wholly, he may live and die as the victim of an infantile tradition, never handed on by any church, or taught by competent authority.

The trail of the nursery and the Sunday school may be said to lie over all English-speaking Christendom. The Bible as learned “at mother’s knee,” rarely rising above the level of Jack the Giant-killer, is probably the source of most of the spiritual bewilderments of later life. The so-called “Bible Stories” invariably raise in a child’s mind, quick and logical as it generally is, questions

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which none but a gifted mother—a great rarity—is competent to answer. Of the answers usually given there is seldom a child who does not see through the insincerity and insufficiency. I am willing to hazard the guess that in nine out of every ten cases of those who in after life become agnostics or indifferentists, the seed of skepticism was sown by nurses, mothers, and Sunday-school teachers who tried to impart what they never understood. After not a little experience, I venture to think that the Bible is not a book for children but for men and women. I will even go so far as to say that it should be opened by men and women only after some preparation as to its main purpose.

II

That purpose must be to help us to know God.

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I suppose that with regard to this statement there can be among Christians no difference of opinion. "This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." The Bible has subsidiary purposes, but this must be the one of most importance.

To me personally, it was a flash of illumination when I learned that this purpose is carried out by showing us the failures as well as the successes through which our predecessors came to know Him in the long procession of the ages. They did this through reasoning, through inference, through speculation, through daring hope, through practical experiment. They were oftener right than wrong, and yet they were often wrong. There were ages in which, with much that was right, error was persistent. Where they were right we have no difficulty; we should also have no difficulty where they made mistakes had

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not our nurses and Sunday-school teachers hammered into our childish minds the theory that they never erred.

In other words, according to our early instructors, who had the opportunity to bend the twig, the characters in the Bible were always right because they were in the Bible. A commendation for some of their qualities was held up as a blanket commendation for all of them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were just emerging out of concepts of God primitive and grotesque, were put on the same plane as Peter, James, and John, to whom the Being of Highest Illumination had revealed the Universal Father. The thousands of years which separated the one group of three from the other group of three, with the changes wrought by progress, culture, habits of speech, and enlargement of experience were not taken into account. All was crowded to-

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gether in the foreground, like the figures in a Flemish tapestry.

To throw off this inhibition of the judgment, to obtain historical perspective, to see the Bible as the story of man's mistakes as to God as well as of his discoveries, gave it for me as an individual a new and common-sense significance. If minor difficulties were not solved thereby, all the major ones were. What had hitherto been a puzzling book to read became at once simple and comprehensible.

One began at the beginning, with the primitive, prehistoric God, who must have been the earliest in the human consciousness. In the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis we have collected and preserved for us all that is wisest and most trustworthy in prehistoric memory. It must not be supposed that a prehistoric world was of necessity a world with no chronicle of past events, and with no formulation of such knowledge as

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primitive men had acquired. On the contrary, everything leads us to presume that the record of tradition was kept faithfully. The fact that there was no written language made exactitude of verbal transmission all the more imperative.

Nothing in literature equals the impressiveness with which this mass of primeval recollections comes out of the darkness before letters were invented. It takes the form of myth, legend, ballad, tables of descent, whatever best preserved a particular phase of their understanding of truth, or told of some actual event. Before it reached the pages of Genesis the material was sifted and sifted again, till the element of vulgarity, obscenity, and absurdity—which still clings to cognate versions of this ancient knowledge—was strained out.

This prehistoric narrative transmitted down to history deals with the manner in

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which our planet was prepared for human habitation, and the stages by which the formative epochs followed on one another. How this information was obtained we have no means of knowing, but to the modern mind, enlightened by the discoveries of the last hundred years, its approach to exactness is amazing. Granting to the word "day" the sense which it bears in actual usage, of a long period of time—as in the present day, a past day, your day, or mine—this account of the expansion of nature is approximately that of the most modern sciences.

Chaos—darkness—waters! The relation of the earth to the solar system! The drying of the waters, the appearing of the land! Vegetation! The dawn of life in the seas! The *megatheria*—the "great whales!" Flying things! Land animals—cattle, reptiles, beasts! Man with mind and dominion!

From this point we go on with man's de-

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velopment. The Bible does not begin with prehistoric man's earliest gropings after God; it takes him at a stage comparatively far on in his advance. It is at the point where he has already begun to develop a moral sense. He perceives a distinction between Good and Evil. He knows that Evil is forbidden, and that Good is somehow connected with God. Evil is attractive—but abortive; Good is difficult—but practical. Good implies life; Evil implies death. Elemental man has already perceived it as the goal of his mortal life to overcome Evil with Good.

The struggle brings into his consciousness two warring factors—the material in Cain, the spiritual in Abel. In the first impulse of this enmity the material slays the spiritual, and seems to stamp it out. But it revives in Seth, whereupon we have the significant intimation that man had begun to perceive the God he had hitherto descried as Power as

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being also Help. "Then began men to call on the name of the Lord." Henceforth the fight between spiritual and material never flags, though for ages the victory seems to lie on the side of the material, as, in fact, it still does to-day.

It is noteworthy that in the line of Cain we find all the material progress. The descendants of Cain—the children of the material ideal—build cities, learn to keep cattle, engage in agriculture, discover the arts, and bring man out of the stone age into that which knew the use of metals. They also push sin to debauchery, till "the wickedness of man was great," and "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The spiritual instinct, having been nearly lost, was regained only through the pressure of calamity.

A flood came, traces of it remaining in the legendary history of many peoples. The hu-

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man race having a chance to begin again, began, as it generally does, on the old material basis. This is symbolized in a tower whose top would reach unto heaven, and defy God. God was disturbed, if not exactly afraid. To protect himself against the united action of men, he introduced the principle of nationality. Men broke up, first into families, then into clans, then into tribes, then into nations. They developed differences of speech. From this time onward they were permanently disunited. Never again would they be able to achieve anything through racial pride or a show of force. The Help which was dimly recognized when men began to call on the name of the Lord must be fully understood as the Universal Father before any ground of future reunion can be reached.

Ages passed, leaving no trace beyond a few monumental names—Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reu. Of them only that of Eber

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is still a living word, finding an echo on the tongue of everyone who chances to speak of a Hebrew. By faint degrees, by footsteps lost in the ocean bed of Time, the prehistoric comes up out of the abyss, and melts into the dawn of history.

It is a mistake to suppose that between historic and prehistoric there is a hard and fast line where one ends and the other begins. They fade into each other, like night into day. When the compiler of the Book of Genesis wrote the words, "And the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee, and I will make of thee a great nation . . . and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed," he probably passed out of the last and farthest range of purely traditional knowledge into the first faint twilight of what we have since come to know as recorded history. A very faint

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twilight as yet, it will broaden and brighten till it becomes noon. From this point onward the God who to the sons of Eber had been a dark and somewhat erratic mystery becomes the guiding, and sometimes the avenging principle in their affairs.

The rest of the Bible, both Old Testament and New, develops the understanding of this principle. Men, in the words of St. Paul, sought God, "if perhaps they might grope for him and find him." The Bible is the history of that groping. Beginning with the prehistoric God of the earlier pages of Genesis, we are led up and up, and on and on, now through stages of progress, now through pauses and lapses, now through migrations, now through wars, now through sin, and now through spasms of repentance and return, but always through all the passions that can tear the human heart, as well as through all that heart's best aspirations and affections—we are

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led up and on till we perceive the Universal Father in the Vision of Jesus Christ.

We can never, it seems to me, read the Bible with real understanding till we see every character, every incident, and all trends of thought as working toward that ultimate Ideal. The connection may not always be easy to discern, but a little investigation will show that it is there. Of any page in the Scriptures the test is the end to which it finally contributes—the knowledge of God as the Father of the Universe, with man as His chief expression. Whether we are in the historic or the prehistoric, whether we wallow in blood or exult in prophecy, whether we are as far from this Ideal as it is possible to stray, or are hard upon it as in certain of the psalms we often are, the Father is the end of our long spiritual search.

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III

Nothing in the story of mankind is more interesting than the stages by which the Ideal of the Father became possible to the human race. Glimpses of God have been seen wherever man has lived. The Egyptians have had theirs, the Greeks theirs, the Romans theirs, the Hindoos theirs, the Chinese theirs, the Moslems theirs. They have been truer or more distorted according to the instinct of the race. But it is always a groping after God, with some measure of ability in finding Him. What gives to the Hebrew effort its supreme importance is its supreme success.

Not, it must be repeated, that the success came all at once, or that it came easily. It came through many errors, held through many centuries. Of these errors there is one on the very surface of the Old Testament which

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sometimes makes it hard for the modern man to read that book with sympathy or approval.

It is the habit of mind, and the turn of phrase, which ascribes to God all the passing impulses of a young and semi-civilized nation in the process of expansion. What their passions or ambitions urged them to do they believed that their God commanded them to do. He was their inspiration and their referee. Standing for all their highest aspiration at any given time, He stood for that but for no more.

It must be remembered that in as far as the Bible sums up the effort to know God, it is not till the call of Abraham that the yearning to seek and find Him centers in the line of Eber. Up to that time it is general to the human race. With the introduction of the national principle, and the cleavage of mankind along the lines of national endowment, the race of Eber specialized in its racial

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gift. This was the spiritual temperament. Where the other peoples, even those of the line of Seth, the spiritual order, went over to the principles of Cain, they, the Hebrews, were faithful to their mission.

At the same time their very faithfulness held a snare for them. The fact that they possessed a faculty for feeling after God led them first into the mistake that they, more than any other people, were God's favorites. From this it was an easy step to see in their Jehovah a God who was specially their own, the God of no one but themselves. This God backed them in their quarrels, supported them in plans of conquest, and drove them on to the ferocities which all peoples of low development rejoice in.

One well-known illustration, by no means the most ruthless that could be found, will suffice as an example of what I mean.

And the children of Israel again did evil in the

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sight of the Lord . . . and the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan . . . the captain of whose host was Sisera . . . and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel. And Deborah, a prophetess . . . she judged Israel at that time. . . .

And she sent and called Barak . . . and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go, and draw toward mount Tabor . . . and I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army . . . and I will deliver him into thine hand.

And the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak . . . Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin . . . and the house of Heber the Kenite.

And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of

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milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. . . .

Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary: so he died.

For this brutal act, a transgression of all the laws of sanctuary and hospitality, we find Jael receiving the benedictions of Deborah in one of the most ecstatic songs of triumph ever penned.

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

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Millions of simple readers, taught from childhood to see in such episodes as this the same standard of right action as they would get, for example, from St. John, have been disconcerted and perplexed. But to find the true significance of these records we must see them from the point of view of a people only emerging out of barbarism. Treachery, cruelty, atrocity being the easiest means to the ends they had before them, they had no more scruples in their use of them than any other nation of their time. The Jehovah who was but one of themselves raised to the status of Godhead would as a matter of course approve of anything that would bring about their victory; He would fight with the weapons they wielded themselves. Their enemies were His enemies; their cause, their battle, and their triumph were all alike His. The semi-savage God of a semi-savage race, He neither shrank from butchery nor felt pity when the victims

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fell. Any other sort of God, for that sort of people, in that stage of their development, would have been impossible.

For it is probable that our perception of God rarely includes more than the sum total of our highest aspirations at any given stage of our advance. This is perhaps all of God that as nations, as churches, or as individuals we can ever see. It is like our perception of the heavens, in which we behold only the stars which, from a certain spot on the planet, at a certain season of the year, on a certain night in the season, at a certain hour of the night, are visible. Creeds may define God, and catechisms explain Him, but the conception of Him must be a matter of epoch, race, and individual personality. It is possible that no two persons have the same conception of God, or see in Him the same resources. The church to which they both adhere may be most exact in all its definitions, and yet each will

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probably understand something different. It is not definition that helps us to know God; it is need and yearning.

To me it seems to stand to reason that the Ideal of God must change with change in time, progress, and mental condition. This does not mean that God changes, but only that our conception of Him must. It is not possible for us to-day to have of Him the same Ideal as that of the first Christian century, or of the last Christian century, or of the Middle Ages, or of the prehistoric ages. We can have only our own.

This then must be pleaded on behalf of a semi-savage people who had semi-savage views of God: They could have had no other. Our own conception of Him extends no farther than our spiritual powers carry us, and that our spiritual powers do not carry us very far is evident in all our churches, in all our civilization. The value of the instance I

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have quoted, as well as of all similar instances scattered throughout the Bible, is that it shows us just how far, at a certain period, men had progressed toward the Vision of the Universal Father. It is not far, and yet it is on the way. Each century, each generation, carried the advance a little farther, till before the Old Testament closes there were those like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and others among the prophets and psalmists who almost touched the Ideal of Jesus Christ. But it was all relative—relative to age, and culture, and spiritual development. It is this relativity which gives its meaning to the earlier Scriptures. Truthfully, faithfully, these writings picture man's upward climb, till he reaches the Celestial Vision.

To my mind the beauty of this Vision is that it appeals to all the demands of our common sense. God as the Universal Father is a God with whom every human being can be satis-

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fied. He meets all needs; He appeases all longings. In proportion as this God is our God, discords will melt into harmony, wars will cease, nations will be seen as co-operative rather than as competitive, differences between churches will grow futile, while the individual will come to demonstrate that Love so much talked of and so little shown by evidence.

That Christians have much to do before they can reach this Ideal must be obvious to anyone. That is to say, we are still in a state of only partial development. In comparison with those who were seeking God two and three thousand years ago, we have made not a little progress. In comparison with those who will still be seeking Him two and three thousand years hence, we are far behind. What remains true, absolute, and unchangeable is that Vision of Jesus Christ which, for

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all the rest of time, is set before us as the end to which we struggle on.

IV

With this end in view, I think it must be clear to us that no one is asked to read the Bible, or take the trouble to understand it, without the prospect of a practical return. The point is one on which to lay stress. Too often, it seems to me, this reading is urged on us as an academic duty, with no manifest objective. The precise good we are to get from it is not explained. The reader has a suspicion that he may be wasting his time. Why should he read, he asks himself, when he does not know for what purpose he is reading? Why should he take the pains to understand an ancient literature, not always sympathetic even where it is intelligible, when for all he can see, he gets along just as well without it?

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To this the answer can be given quite concisely.

The God of the Bible is pre-eminently a God for man's use here on earth. If there is one thing vividly discerned, even in the dimness of the prehistoric, it is this. According to the Scriptures, He is our paramount daily asset. He is the one factor on which we can count that never fails, once we have learned how to count on Him. He assumes our cares; He stills our anxieties; He furthers our plans; He prospers our work; He heals our sickness; He gives us in abundance everything we need.

This is not figurative; it is literal. If it seems contradicted by common experience, it is because in common experience people have not learned how to utilize His generosity. To do this there is a right way and a wrong; and out of every thousand Christians it is possible that nine hundred and ninety-nine will take the wrong. "The secret of the Lord is among

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them that fear Him, and He will show them His Covenant." They who discover that secret, and learn to understand that Covenant, will find it as I have said. The Universal Father is not only a help to those who trust in Him; He is behind their efforts, and takes on Himself their responsibilities. He is an Almighty Resource, an Infinite Peace of Mind.

In the sense in which each age has its own conception of God, this seems to me the special acquisition of the twentieth century. It is not that other centuries lacked it, but only that in our own day it seems to be more general. If the Bible helps us to know God, and if the God whom it helps us to know is the Universal Father—this, we reason, must be what He means to us. If I may again refer to the great authorities—the Anglican, Roman, Evangelical, and Christian Science churches I have spoken of already—this is

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what their combined teaching leads me to: a God who cares for me *now*, who forgives me *now*, who rewards me *now*, who admits me to His Heaven *now*, not putting me off with promises to be kept after I am dead.

It is this putting off with promises which has made the world of the past few generations impatient of religion. It is not, however, the religion of the Bible. Promises to be kept after we are dead find no great place in its pages. It is remarkable how little is said in either Testament as to what will be done for us after we are dead. Most of the promises are for good things here—health, prosperity, happiness. The future will take care of itself if we take care of the present. We take care of the present by co-operation with the Father, who is always, we are given to believe, ready to co-operate with us.

The teaching that we suffer in this world in order to find compensation in the next

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belongs, I think, to that decline of Christianity which began when it became the recognized religion of the Roman state. Assent having taken the place of demonstration, the nominal Christian sank once more into being the victim of Fate, as man had been under paganism. Unable to throw off poverty, sickness, and debased conditions of living, the Christian accepted the doctrine of those who told him that another life would give him what God refused him in this. It was his only consolation. The more he clutched at this single hope the more his teachers urged it home, till we came to have a Christian Church almost impotent to help man in his present phase, except in so far as it schools him to submission.

Against this the twentieth century has reacted. The reaction may not as yet be widespread but it is putting forth its challenge. If the Bible is true, the mighty works which

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were done of old must be possible to-day. If they are possible they must be possible according to a law, and if there is such a law it must be our part to discover it. It is this discovery, this re-discovery which, it seems to me, the modern Christian world is making through the knowledge of God as Dynamic Energy and Practical Working Force.

There is much talk to-day of the need of a new spiritual awakening that will save our world. This, I suppose, is what the talk means first of all—the finding of the Universal Father, who will adjust injustices, reconcile enmities, make the crooked straight, and bring to pass what now seems impossible. To find Him we have many agencies. History helps; science helps; education helps; our own thinking helps; the churches help. But the Bible, read without exaggerations, and by the light of what I may call our sanctified common sense, probably helps most of all.

II

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

CHAPTER II

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

I

IF the Bible is the record of man's progress in the knowledge of God, it is essential to understand some at least of the processes by which it has reached its position of authority. Where so much is claimed, the credentials become the more important; and though it is impossible to deal exhaustively with so large a subject in so limited a space, some lines of suggestion may be sketched.

There were years during which the subject of the inspiration of the Bible was to me personally a puzzle. In what I had been taught

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as to God's taking possession of the minds and pens of certain individuals to produce work which would guide the world into absolute truth I could see little or no reason. The process seemed so woefully roundabout. If He was doing this at all, why should He not have made the result more lucid? Why should He have strewn His course with traps and snares and stumbling-blocks? The Holy Ghost which had indued Moses or David or Paul with an authority different in essence from that of all but their colleagues in producing Holy Writ could as easily as not have made the issue so clear that there would have been no wrangling. A series of divinely dictated books which perplexed the world almost as much as they helped it struck me as perhaps the strangest of all the strange phenomena which religion placed before us.

And yet I held fast to the inspiration. The more I read of the Bible the more sure of it I

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felt. Bewilderment remained, shaking this conviction, but never quite destroying it. It was only with the passage and the thought of years that I was able to get the subject on the rocklike basis of what to me seems common sense.

I beg to repeat here that what I have to say in this, and all other respects, stands for no more than a personal point of view. I am not arguing or trying to convince. If in what follows I seem to speak in that way, it is only for the sake of conciseness. With no desire to convert anyone, I give my views because I have been asked, and only for what they are worth. If they are wrong they are wrong. If, on the other hand, there is anything in them which a single reader finds helpful it will be that much to the good.

I have already acknowledged my debt to the Anglican, Evangelical, Christian Science, and Roman Catholic Churches, and wish to

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acknowledge it again. I speak as one who, in many of their aspects, reverences them all, and yet is outside them all. Outside them all, with some mental perspective between me and them, I am able, it seems to me, to accept more easily what I can accept from them, while what I must put aside disturbs me less. Bringing perspective into play, I am able to see them all as essentially one, with only minor differences between them. They impress me as a great family, with the same ruling traits, the same virtues, the same weaknesses, the same mutual hostilities and loyalties which families develop, with the same verbal bickerings, bitter among themselves, but affecting the outsider only indirectly. Owing them much, and admiring them all, it is from their united opinions, as I get them, that I distil for myself an idea of the Bible which possibly no one of them would countenance.

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II

Beginning with the human race before it has appeared above the horizon of written history, the Bible shows us first an elemental people with an elemental concept of the Divine. Nevertheless, certain principles have been evolved. Between Good and Evil the distinction has been made. Conscience has begun to work. Adam, the Man, and Eve, the Mother—those two fundamental types—having eaten of the Tree to be Desired to Make One Wise, have passed the stage of the innocence which is ignorance. The Garden of Childhood is behind them. Responsibilities have been incurred. The burdens of life must be shouldered. Its problems must be solved. In the opening pages of Genesis the human race has been started on that long upward climb of which we in the twentieth

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century have probably not yet arrived at halfway.

It is not, I take it, the object of the Bible to reflect the whole of that long struggle to the top, but only the part of it in which man works up from his primitive notions of God to the concept of the Universal Father. By reaching the concept of the Universal Father, I do not assume that he discerns all the fullness of God, but only the degree of that fullness which, in our present stage of development, we are able to assimilate. In proportion to God's Infinity, that must be little; in proportion to our own powers, it is much. The Bible begins with a God who is man-like, partial, incomplete; it ends with a Vision of Infinity, Intelligence, and Love beyond any description or definition possible to thought or words. Having reached this point, it stops. It has given us all of which as yet we can make use.

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But whence came its authority to give us anything? How is it that a collection of books, some of which draw from prehistoric data, some of which were penned perhaps three thousand years ago, all of which belong to epochs and conditions alien to our own, can have obtained such a hold on that portion of mankind supposed with reason to be the most materially minded? At the moment of writing I read in the newspapers that the presses which print the Bible cannot keep pace with the demand. How did this demand arise? What maintains it? Why do people buy and read this ancient book, when they can buy and read so much that is newer, fresher, and, on the surface at least, more directly suited to their twentieth-century needs?

Of one thing we can be certain, that, unless these books supplied something which the heart of Europe and America craves for its sustenance, no such demand would continue.

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Nowhere else in history, to my knowledge, do we find a group of peoples, extremely diverse among themselves, appropriating a whole literature not their own, which they had no part in producing, and living on it as they never live on the most vital works of their own children.

The phenomenon calls attention to itself, and is perhaps its own best explanation.

Demand is always in proportion to the quality of the supply. That is all. There is no further mystery. It is with the Bible as with everything else. Where there is that which meets a need those who feel the need will turn to it. No factitious sentiment would keep the printing presses of the Bible working overtime. No pietistic, or sectarian, or ecclesiastical incitement could, year in and year out, support a sale which possibly equals that of all the rest of the books in the world put together. Life does not work that way.

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Nothing is continually and eagerly bought and paid for which is not worth its price to the purchasers. Deception or over-estimation may rule for a time, but it is discovered in the long run. If in the long run the demand for any article is greater than it ever was we may depend upon it that there is value in that article which is not to be found elsewhere.

There, then, is the basic reason for the Bible's authority—its value. Make all the allowances you like for the unread Bibles on the shelves of homes, schools, and churches, and there still must remain a vast number of people in the world, studying these books, and finding in them truths essential to their welfare. It is they who primarily give to this volume its right to speak. It is they who have primarily given it ever since the days when the first of these spiritual classics was singled out as having a special quality.

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III

The fact should be recognized that this was not done by some magic stroke outside the methods of nature, or by a mysterious divine influence differing from everything else we know. This is to cheapen the Bible and divine influence alike. The master-works of Hebrew literature took their place in public esteem by exactly the same process as those of any other literature. It was a matter of general acclaim, similar to that which gave Shakespeare his rank among English writers, or Dante his among Italians, or Emerson his among Americans. Led doubtless by the cultured and critical—as culture and criticism were understood—the mass of the people came to know that such and such a work had a significance of its own, and it was placed apart.

Let us put ourselves back in the days be-

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fore any portion of our existing Bible had been compiled or composed. It was already, as recent discoveries in Egypt have shown us even more vividly than we knew before, a period of high cultivation. Among the Hebrews the ancient Babylonian wedge-shaped script, suitable for use on hard materials but not elastic in expression, had been superseded by a Hebrew alphabet nearly as graphic as our own. The clay tablet and the stone stele had been replaced by parchment or some form of paper made from the Egyptian papyrus. Manuscripts were not common, but they existed. Where they existed they were held, and housed, in honor. Scholars were familiar with their contents. At times they were read aloud to audiences, as lectures among ourselves. There was an interested public. It was a public so well informed as to the substance of their literature that a reference was all they required. In the historical books of the Old

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Testament, where some of a king's most significant acts have been given, we come repeatedly on a formula like this: "Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?" Or again: "Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and what he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?" That is to say, for a people who knew so well such books as they possessed a mere *videlicet* was enough.

Equally well, doubtless, they knew their other books, of which fragments at most have survived into our time. The Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah mentioned above were not the First and Second Books of Chronicles of our present Old Testament. There were these histories now lost to us; there were others. There was the Book of Jasher; the Book of Gad; the Book

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of Nathan; the Book of Shemaiah; the Book of Iddo the Seer; the Book of the Wars of the Lord. There were others still. Some were earlier than any of the books of our Bible; some were written while the Bible was in course of formation. My point is simply that there was a literature more or less known and enjoyed by the public to whom it was addressed.

To this public then came the first of the books we now hold as sacred. Many critics think it was the Book of Job. For our present purpose the particular work is unimportant, and the Book of Job will serve as well as any other. The fact to bear in mind is that to those who first read it, or heard it read aloud, it was not a more sacred book than books already familiar. There was no one to say, "This will be the nucleus of our Bible." There was no thought in any mind that thousands of years later, in continents called Eu-

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rope and America, millions of readers would pore over that book, and mark it with hundreds of millions of annotations. It was just one more book where there were already a good many. It is probable that the class to which the Book of Job belongs, the dramatic poem, was fairly well represented. The author had possibly written other books. Great masterpieces do not, as a rule, spring all alone. That the Book of Job is the sole survivor of its type and time means no more than the solitary column which marks the site where once there was a city.

But some power was at work to keep this book a living thing when other books, which at first seemed equally vital, passed out of mind. The same power acted on behalf of another book, and of another, and of another still. What was it? To all intents and purposes it was the power of instinctive, popular critical acumen. I call it instinctive for the

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reason that, even with regard to the works of the present day, we have never learned how and why it acts. I call it popular because its decisions come somehow from the heart of a whole people. It is not only among the Hebrews that we have seen it at work, but among all the nations with vitality enough to produce a literature.

By this spirit of critical acumen, in the course of centuries, a selection of works was set aside as classical. As time went on the number of these works increased. As readers drew from their wisdom a more and more energizing strength, veneration for them became still more deeply rooted. But it must not be forgotten that the action was that which has singled out merit at all times, the use of a sound judgment on the part of the intelligent. In other words, the Hebrew classics were marked as classics in the same way as the Greek or the English. The values by

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which they were appraised were different, but the method was the same. The Bible would probably gain much in living, practical use to us if we could view it free from the artificial or superstitious slants which the teachers of our childhood, for the most part unauthorized and uninformed, have taught us to assume.

Otherwise expressed, Hebrew literature commends itself to the world by its own inherent value, and not because it is forced on our attention by the decrees of Jewish or Christian Councils. Jewish and Christian Councils have indorsed it, but they indorsed it long after the choice of works had, in the main, been made. Gold has its value as gold, not because the mint puts a stamp on it. The stamp of the mint means something; but it would mean nothing were the real gold not there. The gold, then, gives its authority to the Bible, not the image and superscription put on it by any body of men whatever. All

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that a body of men could have undertaken was to define, delimit, corroborate, and accept what had been done by instinctive, popular critical acumen centuries before.

This is not said to minimize the authority of Jewish or Christian Councils, but to give their due meed of credit to the Scriptures themselves. To those who find what they have to give, they are their own best introduction. Were this not so, the books which run from Genesis to the Apocalypse would never have stood out above those of Nathan or Gad or Iddo the Seer. The pre-eminence is natural, spontaneous, like that of the Alps or the Canadian Rockies above the surrounding valleys and plains. Where the spirit of man is passionate in searching after God it will, of course, reach a higher and more glowing point than where it is less intense. The high points are those which the Bible reveals to us. They are sometimes obscured by what may seem to

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us irrelevant matter; but in the end they will make themselves visible, as the Schreckhorn and the Jungfrau will show their white peaks over seas of cloud.

IV

What then becomes of the mysterious force we call inspiration?

We shall see that better if we know what we mean by the word. It is a word that has been used so vaguely, so inexactly, I will even say, so corruptly, that a simple matter has been made to appear difficult.

Moreover, and the fact cannot be stressed too strongly, a tradition acquired "at mother's knee" has so woven itself around the phrase "verbal inspiration" that much passes current as Christian belief which Christians have never dogmatically taught. Lack of space forbids me to dwell on these assumptions, but

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we cannot forget that they are made. We can perhaps meet them best by finding the basic co-operation through which God becomes the dynamic energy not only of the universe at large, but of the rightly directed works of man.

Briefly it is this: God is man's working power. Our works are more inspired in proportion as they keep close to God; they are less inspired in proportion as they tend away from Him. In complete departure from God, if that were possible, there would be no inspiration at all. In complete surrender to Him, as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, the inspiration would be full.

It is necessary to point out here that this inspiration must be available for all our undertakings. To see God as infusing Himself into one part of our legitimate life, and not infusing Himself into another part, is to bring inconsistency into the Universal. To

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to speak of Him as giving more inspiration here, and less inspiration there, is to ascribe to Him an element of caprice. It is, in fact, to make Him in large measure the cause of our failures and defects. If He helps us to be right at one time, and does not help us at another, the responsibility for our going wrong must, at least to some extent, be His. If by an extraordinary use of His Holy Spirit He compels Matthew and Mark to write good books, and refuses this Spirit to me, when He could so easily breathe it into me, then He is to blame for my inefficiency. A spasmodic inspiration would surely become the cause of our merely spasmodic successes.

In all that we do that is right Omnipresent Energy must, from its very nature, be backing us to the last possible degree. There is not more inspiration for this task, and less inspiration for that; there must be full inspiration for every task. To ourselves some tasks

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may seem more important than others. To Him, who sees the end which all things serve, all that is right must be equally significant and essential.

Our initial confusion as to inspiration springs from the idea that God is more concerned with some of our occupations than He is with others, and that for some of them He gives us extra help, while He leaves others to take care of themselves. In this way we speak of a poet as inspired to write a song, but not of a carpenter to build a house. We speak of a bishop as being inspired to preach a sermon, but not of a banker to extend a loan. We speak of the Church as inspired to teach the truth, but not of the Government to put it into action. It is easy enough to think of the Holy Ghost being present when the Book of Ruth was composed, or the Gospel according to St. John, but not when Mr. Edison invented the electric light or Madame Curie discovered

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radium. God, for perhaps most of us, is a Being interested in churches, in services, in philanthropies, and all compositions to which we would append the word sacred, but not in business, or science, or railways, or coal-mining, or any but the most idealistic forms of art. From the part of our life with which we ourselves are most anxiously preoccupied we shut His inspiration out.

To no small extent it is a matter of verbal expression. With the phraseology of our understanding we use our words backward. We say that God's inspiration goes more into this than into that when we mean that this more than that utilizes God's inspiration. God's inspiration must be universal, since God Himself is universal. It is for all to breathe in like the air. It is for all right tasks, for all useful purposes. If the poet gets more of it than the carpenter, it is because he is mentally keeping closer to the source of it. If the

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bishop gets more of it than the banker, it is because he is more consciously depending upon it. If the Church gets more of it than the State, it is because it expects to receive it. But all receive it to some degree, even when they do not expect it, or depend upon it consciously. God being the working energy of man, His force may be wasted, abused, or misapplied, but never lost entirely.

The Bible, therefore, is not only inspired as all other honest work is inspired, but it is inspired in the same way. If it reveals a higher measure of inspiration than any other work, it is not because it was given it, but because it has reached it. The powers its writers displayed in reaching it caused their books to be singled out. Gad, or Shemaiah, or Iddo the Seer might have reached it too, but they fell short. Relatively, we all fall short, our artists, our scientists, our preachers, our priests, and our saints. Up to the present the

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writers whose works compose our Bible have grasped the universal inspiration to a point at which they have no rivals. They are our inspired writers *par excellence*, through the greatness of their achievement.

It will be noted that the fact that God did nothing for them which He does not do for all of us by no means detracts from His honor or from theirs. On the contrary, it seems to me to add to that of both. There is something puerile in ascribing to God special efforts in this direction or in that. If He is going to make special efforts at all, we might reasonably expect Him to make them oftener, and with more efficiency. He might ward off from us sicknesses, disasters, calamities, wars. The fact that, even when besieged by prayer, He refuses so to do has often made Him seem to the heartbroken an unreasonable, futile God, not worth believing in. Granting the existence of a God who can make special ef-

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forts if He likes, and yet will not make them, one cannot refuse some sympathy to the indignation that denounces Him. On the other hand, a God who always gives all to all, and who gives to all, differently, doubtless, and yet without injustice or inequality, is so easy to understand that the heart goes out to Him spontaneously.

V

Inspiration, then, being full and free, not only for the purposes of the Scriptures, but for all other purposes as well, what particular end is it meant to serve?

As far as the Bible is concerned, we might say in a general way that it serves as a guide to truth. Truth is one of the Bible's main objectives. By this I mean that, whatever the stages of development of the people whom it portrays, whether more primitive or more ad-

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vanced, it shows them as at all times struggling after truth. To put up this struggle is this people's ruling instinct. Where the Greek's ruling instinct may loosely be said to be for Beauty, and the Roman's for Law, the Hebrew's is for the working out of Truth as the medium of life.

Not that they were always conscious of this aim, or that, as a life-motive, it was constant. Rather it was a blind impulse, often erroneously followed, often perverted or forsaken. Often, too, they rejected Truth after it had been made known to them. The pages of the Bible teem with their misconceptions, their abjurations, their distortions, denials, and apostacies. And yet in the end the movement was forward. Just as among ourselves progress maintains itself in spite of crises in which all that is best seems threatened with collapse, so among them there was the ebb and flow of

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effort which always carried the advance a little farther.

Like the longing for God Himself, this longing for Truth, in spite of recessions and betrayals, worked up and up till it found its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. Truth was what He came to exemplify. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth." This purpose might be said to underlie all His other purposes. It might be said to infuse and mold and direct them. He not only knew the Truth, He lived it, He made it manifest in action. It is what gives breadth and height to His mission. In it lies, I think, the secret of the charm which draws all men unto Him. With this life as its crowning point, the Bible has become a compendium of Truth and of truths beyond anything else in our possession.

Here we must recognize and keep in mind

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some of our own limitations. Truth is doubtless a final Absolute, complete, positive, without variations. Reading of Truth in the Bible, we should be able to see it at a glance. The many specific and separate truths should be self-evident, admitting of no dispute.

And yet, as it is, we have a common saying that you can prove anything out of the Bible. The implication is that the meanings you can read into it are so numerous that they lead you nowhere. If they lead you anywhere, it is into confusion. It is a fact that of the three hundred and more Christian sects each takes its stand by the Bible. Out of the Bible each proves itself right. Through the Bible each is ready to confound all who differ from its views.

When you come to individuals, of whom it is probable that in the last analysis no two, however dogmatic the sect to which they belong, have exactly the same beliefs, the con-

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flict of evidence, always drawn from the Bible, can be classed beneath the heading of the humorous. If you were the proverbial inhabitant of Mars come down to earth to seek an explanation of the Christian Church in terms of its Holy Scriptures, you would be likely to find that no two Anglicans, or two Baptists, or two Presbyterians, or two Roman Catholics, or two Second Adventists, would agree in what they would tell you. Each would think that he was interpreting the formulas of his church with a reasonable exactitude, and yet, such is the capacity of the human mind for individuality, that each would really be seeing from his own unique point of view.

The oddest fact of all is that, considered with detachment, each of the three hundred sects, each of the millions of individuals, can be more or less justified out of the Bible's pages. If you carefully follow their reasonings, and if you exclude for the moment all

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other lines of reasoning, you will see how much there is to establish their convictions. It is this that enables the Anglican, the Baptist, the Methodist, the Congregationalist, the Plymouth Brother, the Roman Catholic, the Quaker, and the Second Adventist each to swear by his own interpretation of the Scriptures, and ban all others as anathema.

Now this incoherence is not on the Bible's part; it is on our own. Truth as expressed in the Scriptures is of vast extent. It is not only stupendous in sum, but intricately rich in detail. Sentences of half a dozen words are profound. Profound sentences are scattered as profusely as shells on the seashore. Their complete inter-relation is as yet beyond our grasp. Having no classification for truths as we have for crustacea, we can only deal with them singly, or at best in little groups. Our view is so narrow that we see Truth only in spots. Each of us sees a few truths at a

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time, according to his capacity for spiritual sight. The whole of Truth is like the whole of the universe, an immensity beyond our range. Even the Bible does not present the whole of Truth; but it presents more than any one man, or any group of men, be it nation, church, or federation of the world, can as yet compass or co-ordinate.

A long step in advance will have been taken when one man is able to concede to another the ability to see in the Bible something of Truth that has escaped himself. It will be a longer one still when one church is able to make this concession to another church. Only something of the sort will give us that inter-sectarian charity essential to saving the Christianity of our day, so clumsy and uneconomic as it is, from seeming a wastage and a futility.

But after all, and in the final test, the value of anything whatever is its value to the individual. If one man who needs one thing can

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find it in the Bible, and another man who needs another thing can find that also there, it is the Bible's wealth that must be apparent, not the boneless disposition we are often inclined to ascribe to it of being all things to all men. It *is* all things to all men, but in the sense of meeting out of its abundance the most diverse spiritual needs. No real seeker after God can turn to it and be disappointed. He may be puzzled; he may be given tough material to deal with; he may find the supply so much greater than his individual demand that by it he is almost overwhelmed; but all types, and all tastes, and all ecclesiastical leanings, and all racial promptings, and all moral states of mind or soul, can be satisfied therefrom.

VI

Inspiration acting in the Scriptures as a guide to Truth, it is important to remember

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the precise kind of Truth the Hebrew was trying to work out. Like everyone else, he had his limitations. He could go no farther than his national gift carried him. There were aspects of Truth, plainly evident to us, which he, in the main, ignored.

In the main he ignored, 1. Historic Truth; 2. Scientific Truth; 3. Truth in the sense of exactitude of statement as to persons and events.

1. Historic Truth was almost unknown to the ancient world, as even to the modern world it is still without its sharpest point of precision. With all our advantages of scholarship and research, the histories of twenty and thirty and fifty years ago are in no small measure obsolete. History on the whole is no more than one man's weaving of conflicting stories into a narrative that seems probable. Where strong interests center, as around periods like the Reformation or the French Revolution, or

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about characters such as Mary Stuart or Napoleon Bonaparte, there are as many versions of the theme as there are historians to handle it.

If variation can be so common with the open archives of the modern world, still more must that condition have obtained where records were so few. As a matter of fact the ancient historian made little pretense at being accurate. Only at times did he possess the information to make him so. Taking the relatively little that he knew, he added what had come to him as hearsay, filling in with what he himself judged as likely to have occurred. He enlarged on events; he composed speeches. To historical exactitude his audience was not sensitive, just as even now, in the twentieth century, no public that genuinely cares for historical exactitude has as yet been born.

2. Still less was it the mission of the Scriptures to give us information on the subjects

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we class to-day as scientific. By the ancient world scientific knowledge in our modern sense had not been dreamed of. It was scarcely dreamed of by Europe and America till within a hundred years. It was, in fact, the coming to birth of a real Physical Science in the middle of the nineteenth century that directed the Church and the world to the Bible's actual purpose. After the so-called struggle between Science and Religion, in the 'seventies, 'eighties, and 'nineties of the last century, the Bible ceased to be a mere handbook of useful knowledge, and became, to an extent that it had never been before, the veritable Word of God.

3. With regard to temporal facts the attitude of the ancient mind was so different from our own as to render it nearly incomprehensible to people like ourselves. One is driven to assume that the faculty of precision had not yet been developed, as it is not developed in

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young children. The difficulty experienced by young children in discerning between what has happened and what they imagine to have happened is now a recognized condition of early childhood. The credulity of ancient peoples must be part of the same disability. When the mind is undeveloped the boundary line between everyday life and wonderland is moved easily. Strange tales are easily believed. Facts are not hard, concrete, clearly outlined; they are vague, pliable, lending themselves to whatever use a speaker or a writer makes of them. The value of the literal event, with no less and no more, did not attain to general recognition till within the last two or three generations. Though tentatively pointed out by Aristotle, and emphasized in the thirteenth century by Roger Bacon, it was not till the nineteenth century that the child-mind of the race began to be outlived.

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It is not a question of truth and falsehood; it is one of the adjustment of the mind to reality. The modern mind is only partially so adjusted; the ancient mind was scarcely adjusted so at all. There are incidents recorded in the Old Testament which would doubtless not have been included had the compilers possessed the critical equipment of the twentieth century. Even so, our grandfathers had no difficulty in accepting them, and the disturbance of simple minds when asked to view such narratives through correct historical perspective is within living memory.

What we can reasonably expect from the Bible is the gradual climbing up to the highest spiritual point of view; and this is what we find. The effort to reach it lies behind myth, legend, tradition, historical artlessness, lyric hymn, and prophecy, waxing stronger as it runs. Inspiration is the force which urges it along.

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This inspiration may be briefly expressed as God's co-operation with man's endeavor. It takes man's endeavor at the stage at which it is. If it is credulous it takes it there. If it is naïve it takes it there. If it is struggling up to higher and wider outlooks it takes it there. It is man's best friend for all his efforts, accepting man as he stands. It does not leave him in the lurch because he is not wiser than he is, or, on the other hand, force him on to knowledge which he has not worked out for himself. It is with him in all the ups and downs and backings and fillings of his progress. Unlike much of our own good intention, it is not in a hurry. It gives man his time. Without haste, it is also without rest, content with no lower objective than that *All-Truth* into which the Spirit of Truth will eventually guide us.

III

THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

CHAPTER III

THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

I

IT is a pity that some of the most significant phrases which the Christian religion has brought into our language should have been so conventionalized by overwork as to have lost much of their freshness of meaning. Repentance! Forgiveness! Redemption! Revelation! Atonement! Salvation! By our peculiar Anglo-Saxon use of words like these, often pietistic, oftener still sanctimonious, we have infused them with suggestions of cant which make commonsense people shy of them. Our habit of indiscriminate and vulgar evangelism heightens this distaste. Where the cus-

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tom of the country permits any tinker or peddler who thinks himself a messenger from God to stand at a street corner and pelt his audience with great words distorted out of their true meaning, the spiritual language soon becomes debased. To a considerable degree it is debased in English. It has lost not only the sharpness of its point, but some of its claim to have a point at all.

Among the phrases which have suffered most is that which forms the heading of the present article, the Bible as the Word of God. Most Christians, nominal or actual, are willing to admit that the Bible is the Word of God, but when they have done so they are vague as to what it is they have admitted. It is probable that to the majority of English-speaking Christians, the Bible as the Word of God is a venerable figure of speech to be treated with that pseudo-pietism which passes among us for reverence, but not a term with

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a definite, practical application, such as we find in "radio," "carburetor," or "stock exchange."

This is the more to be regretted since the words bring down to us one of the most ancient traditions in the world. It is more than a tradition in that it is the unfolding of man's deepest spiritual experiences till they culminate in a marvelous fulfillment. Of the several great ideas whose development throughout the Old Testament and into the New is persistent, this of the Word of God is perhaps the oldest, and certainly one of the most powerful. It begins at the beginning of the Scriptures, growing larger and more comprehensive until the great event to which it has strained forward justifies all its forecasts.

II

If we seek a strong and simple meaning for the phrase we shall find that the strongest and

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simplest lies right on the surface of the syllables. For a word is that which conveys the thought in one mind to the understanding of another mind. Search as we will, be as scholarly or as theological as we like, we shall find no more natural or exhaustive explanation of the Word of God to man. God's thought is conveyed to man's understanding, and conveyed in the way in which, as we have already seen, His thoughts are always conveyed—through the struggles of individuals to reach higher levels, deeper insights, and a more advanced knowledge of Himself.

I suppose that the most decisive of all steps in human progress was made on that far-off, prehistoric day when between two human beings a word was pronounced, was understood, and was repeated. The minute the thought in one mind was conveyed to another mind in terms which could be modified or enlarged, man truly became a living soul. All

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the potentialities latent in his nature were then opened up to an apparently endless development.

A word implies self-expression, and self-expression implies self-revelation. Here we have the essentials of what we mean by the Word of God. God's Expression of Himself; God's Revelation of Himself. They come through the story of human progress, through the drama of human experience, through the bold advances into truth made here by a poet and there by a prophet who return with their spiritual spoils; but the main fact is that they come. If a ruling purpose of the Bible is to help us to know God, it is also a ruling purpose to show us that we can know God only because God reveals Himself. God being God, He cannot do other than reveal Himself.

At the same time we do well to remember that God's Self-Expression is wider than can be contained in any book. It is part of the

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erroneous use of the great Christian terms that God's Revelation of Himself is so often understood narrowly. By nine religionists out of ten, perhaps by more, it is presented in terms of a "scheme" by which we can be kept from committing sins, or relieved of their consequences if we have committed them. Undoubtedly some such purpose must lie within the scope of Revelation; but God's Self-Expression cannot be limited to a single strain, even if that strain be Redemption.

For the only confines we can put to God's Manifestation of Himself are those which we put to the Universe. The Universe expresses Him in general; the details of the Universe express Him in particular. While this may seem a platitude, it is one of those platitudes so persistently ignored that it needs persistent repetition. From my point of view it is our tendency to see God as expressed only in a book, and not in everything that is, which is

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at the back of all the wranglings between religion and science, between Modernist and Fundamentalist, between one sect and another.

The immensity transcending all our grasp of measurement which we understand as the Universe is the immensity of God; the infinite detail by which the Universe brings its dynamic power down to us is the detail of God. This God is always visible. We talk of a world in which God is not seen, and of another world in which He will be seen. I know only of a world in which we see Him. As I write I look out on a windy May day when the maples, elms, and chestnuts are tossing their branches in unimaginable beauty. In the gardens and on the lawns the irises are following on the tulips, as the tulips followed on the hyacinths, while lilacs, white and purple, line the street. Within a few hundred yards stands a great university in whose laboratories men are investigating the force of

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gases and the power of animalculæ. A walk of five minutes would take me to an observatory in which some of the most important discoveries in the heavens have been made. Everywhere there are factories turning the resources of nature to account for man's benefit. Everywhere there are homes with at least the average of love, kindness, and neighborly good-will.

This, in the myriad forms of its application, stands to me for the broad outlines of God's Revelation of Himself. Wherever there is beauty, power, good, or love, there must be His manifestation. One age develops it in one way, another in another way; but each is the complement to each. Abraham, Moses, Isaiah make certain discoveries; and Galileo, Newton, and Thomas Edison certain others; but they co-operate to one end. The epoch of Moses built a Tabernacle and an Ark; that of Pericles the Parthenon; that of Europe and

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America in the twentieth century an airplane, a motor car, or a tower of giant beauty which, as we say in our picturesque lingo, "scrapes the sky"; but all are expressions of the power which is God. We never travel by a steamboat or speak through a telephone without making use of some part of His Self-Revelation.

We may use it clumsily as yet; we may even use it injuriously; but our hope is some day to use it advantageously. Just as there are cutworms in our gardens, mosquitoes in our swamps, shrikes in our woods, lions in our jungles, and a vast system of apparent cruelty by which one creature preys on another and man on them all—so man preys on his fellow-man and turns God's forces against him. But that all conscious life is still unreconciled to God was seen as long ago as by Isaiah. Man is not the only being who misunderstands His will. Wherever there is a spark of intelli-

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gence there is also a spark of aggression. To all the lower orders of mind, life is the enemy of life. To kill is instinctive. It was so with man in his earlier stages, and in large measure is so to-day. But man's progress beyond killing is now a topic for all the magazines and newspapers. It was the contention of Isaiah, nearly three thousand years ago, that as man advanced in his knowledge of the God who is Life, he would draw the humbler orders after him. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." That not merely man but all Creation is subject to the law of progress is to my mind a large part of the right understanding of God.

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III

Revelation being a universal process, in which all history, all science, all philosophy, all art, all religion are co-operative agencies, the written Word of God would be a single strand in it. The mission of that Word must be definite and particular. The Universe is general; but it is of the very nature of a Word that it should be specific. It is uttered to convey the thought in one mind to the understanding of another mind. It proceeds from intelligence to intelligence. It has purpose and significance. It has limitations. In as far as it can express the Infinite it must be by details, an aspect at a time, a phase in the course of generations. But when we have grouped these phases, these aspects, as recorded in the Bible, there emerges a Being who transcends both time and space.

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In other words, God's Self-Expression as revealed through Creation would probably have remained vague had not some definite message told us what to look for and where to look. Natural religion, as it is called, always tends toward the fantastic or the grotesque. A glance at the religions of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, or at the nobler philosophies of the Far East, will, for most Europeans and Americans, be a sufficient proof of that. The Bible, on the other hand, is sane. The essence of the Word it brings from God to man is simple, sound, and free from the fanciful. Natural religion suggests readily enough that the Universe expresses Him; but the Bible goes a long step farther in telling us *how* it expresses Him. It is the *how* that makes the difference. Through the three thousand years of the Bible's development it keeps this objective steadily, if not consciously, in mind. How God becomes God; why we may rea-

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sonably accept and trust Him as God—this is the theme at which the pioneers of Truth worked without digression. Their line begins in what to us is the fabulous prehistoric; it goes on without a break; and it never ends. Even when Jesus of Nazareth, in His presentation of God as Father, lifts us to what is perhaps the highest pinnacle of spiritual knowledge which in this stage of existence we shall ever reach, new pioneers, are needed to make the meaning clear.

For it has to be admitted that the books which we call the Bible puzzle us by their complexity. If they bring the Word of God to man, the thought in one mind to the understanding of another, then the scroll is enclosed in a casket which provokes amazement even before we put in the key. In one place its workmanship is exquisite, in another barbaric, in another crude, in another distorted, in another alien to all our conceptions of Truth and

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natural law. We are often so astounded at these strange external patterns that we forget to look within.

There, I think, is the secret of most of the difficulties which beset the reader. He does not remember, or is unaware, that this Word of God is a sword in a scabbard, a jewel in a shrine. The sword, not the scabbard, is the weapon; the jewel, not the shrine, is the thing of great price. And yet the shrine, the scabbard, the casket so dominate the eye that one thinks of little else.

Otherwise expressed, the Word of God consists of spiritual truth conveyed to us by whatever means the methods of an epoch offer. Coming through man, spiritual truth takes the outer imprint of man upon itself, while the idea remains unaffected. In the prehistoric it is given the forms of myth, legend, tradition, ballad—whatever would best condense it for being handed on. In the days of the ancestral

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heroes it becomes biographical. As the nation develops it is wrapped in historic chronicles. When spiritual truth has passed beyond anything known to Abraham, Moses, or David, psalmists and prophets clothe it in the forms peculiar to themselves. Then we have it in the Gospels, in the writings of St. Paul, and lastly in that wonder of all time, the Divine Apocalypse.

But all this is no more than incidental. It is interesting and yet not vital to the import of the Word of God. Spiritual truth is within these externals but not dependent upon them. The shell protects the kernel, but the kernel is what serves for food. A shell can reasonably be a subject for study; how it grows, what properties it consists of, by what means it adapts itself to its special protective functions; but the kernel containing the seed of life will remain the more important of the two.

Now the Word of God is a kernel, a sword,

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a pearl of great price, a scroll within a casket. Casket, shrine, scabbard, and shell may be wondered at stupidly, or tested scientifically, or revered, or derided, or destroyed, and it would make no difference to the Word of God. The spiritual meaning would be there still, and would still reach such minds as are ready to receive it. The process by which it reaches us is human and ancient. Like all other processes human and ancient it is superficially confused, often exaggerated, at times perhaps erroneous. But the Word of God within these mummy-cloths is vital and infallible. Have we an infallible Bible? Yes, of course. But it is the inner Bible, not of necessity the outer one.

And yet it is only to the outer one that we give much attention.

Scholars, preachers, private readers spend most of their efforts on that. We look for the Bible's infallibility not in its spiritual mes-

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sage but in its outside husk. If the outside husk can be shown to have a crack in it, the essential truth is supposed to have a crack in it. For to the vast majority of Christians, and possibly of Jews, the outside husk is everything.

The main part of the conflict being waged so bitterly to-day between the schools known as Modernist and Fundamentalist is a conflict over the husk. It rarely if ever gets further than the letter of the Word. Regardless of Paul's saying that "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life," it spends all its attention on the wrappings in which the spirit is conveyed. Both contestants might easily give the impressions that exactitude of temporal statement is all there is to the Bible. Its fallibility and infallibility are made to turn on such questions as whether or not there ever was a deluge, a Noah, and an Ark of gopher wood; whether or not the Red Sea divided

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for the passage of the Israelites; whether or not the Ten Commandments were actually engraved on stone by the Finger of God—a digit like that on a human hand—as a man might write on a slab of dough, or given in some simpler way.

That these are interesting questions is not to be denied. Nor can it be denied that the work done by critics, scholars, and excavators within the last hundred years is of value beyond estimation. My point is merely that to form schools for and against their conclusions can only be misleading to simple folk looking for common-sense guidance. When a reverend divine thunders from his pulpit that he doesn't believe the story of the Tower of Babel; when an equally reverend divine thunders back that you must believe the story of the Tower of Babel or be damned; when the newspapers make capital of this difference of opinion, with headlines even more sensational

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than the sermons they report, the man in the street can hardly be other than bewildered. If he cares at all he is disgusted rather than profited by these disputes. If he doesn't care he is as likely as not to brush the whole Bible aside as a collection of old wives' tales.

IV

Peace would come to many minds, it seems to me, if we understood that there are two readings of the Bible, a literal and a spiritual. The literal is difficult, requiring many kinds of knowledge, open to widely differing interpretations. The spiritual, on the other hand, is relatively easy, and when seen it commends itself to our common sense with an almost unanimous acceptance.

It could hardly be otherwise with what we understand to be the Word of God. In conveying the thought in His Mind to our minds

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it cannot be His purpose to perplex us. Simplicity and clarity are qualities which on His part we are entitled to expect. I think it will be found that most of the doctrines which create schisms between churches are drawn from the Biblical externals and not from the truths that lie within. Much that is ecclesiastical goes no deeper than that which is Modernist or Fundamentalist. It roams on the surface among the divergencies raised by changes in age, in taste, in nationality, in racial development. The whole history of the rise of sects can be read in the lifting to the rank of eternal truth some bit of belief or some ritual act which had only a temporal significance. Where there is such wide disagreement as there is between the many Christian schools, it seems to me extremely doubtful that the spiritual Word of God enters as a factor. Where God truly speaks there cannot be much room for human disagreement. The battles

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of the schools, like those of the Modernist and the Fundamentalist, are fought about the husk.

And if there is this difference between the literal and spiritual reading of the Bible, perhaps it will make it clearer if I take a concrete example. It will be only an example, a specimen of what can be applied from one end to the other of the Scriptures. My object will be, with a certain short book of the Old Testament, to make obvious, first, the simple and straightforward spiritual import of the book, and then the comparative unimportance of the vehicle in which the great truth is conveyed.

For this purpose I choose the Book of Jonah. I choose it partly on the ground that a cheap sense of humor has made this book, even to careful readers of the Bible, a serio-comic thing, hard to approach reverently. But I choose it chiefly because to my mind,

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and to many other minds, it stands for the spiritual high-water mark of the Old Testament. I have no hesitation in saying that, spiritually read, it is one of the most tender, most noble, and most enlightened bits of writing ever set down with a pen. Even in the New Testament there is nothing which, in the special truth being placed before us, can be taken as its parallel. There is nothing in the accumulated literature of the Christian Church which gives this truth its due consideration. Not till we come to our own time do we find it entertained at all, and then for the most part only with a trembling, half-apologetic hope that these things might be so. Only one group of Christians, so far as I know, openly stresses the advanced and beautiful teaching of the Book of Jonah, though I should be glad to learn that there was another.

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V

It will help me if before going any further I say a word as to its literary form. Here I fall back on my reading of the best modern scholars—I have no scholarship of my own—but in doing that of course I can be justified.

It is a well-known Hebrew literary form, and is called the *Midrash*. A *Midrash* was, according to Professor Driver, the English scholar, “an imaginative development of a thought or theme suggested by Scripture.” It could also be “an edifying religious story.” It was not precisely fictional in that it was founded on something already written, on something that had happened, or at least on some holy legend or tradition. It was an extension, an embellishment. It took what had perhaps been only hinted at elsewhere and gave to the idea the first rank in importance.

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Though the purpose of the *Midrash* was instructive, the form was very free. So long as the author was true to his main intention he could invent, adorn, invoke wonders, or keep to the prosaic as best served his turn. Two other *Midrashim* more or less well known to us, the stories of Susanna and of Tobit, both among the Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament, are examples of this latitude. The story of Susanna is a matter-of-fact narrative not unlike the episodic tale of our modern magazines. In the story of Tobit there is a wider appeal to the supernatural. In that of Jonah the touch is more distinctly Oriental, suggesting the same kind of imaginative freedom which we see in the *Arabian Nights*. Frankly a vehicle for truths and not for everyday facts, it is at no more pains to keep close to the incidents of life as it is lived than is *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Now let me try to tell the tale of Jonah

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with the spiritual meaning uppermost. It is the story of a man who did his best to escape the will of God, but found that what a modern poet calls the "hound of heaven" followed after him and would not let him go. More than that, it is the story of a man who had shut his heart within a narrow sectarian view of God, in which only he and his kind were favored by divine protection, yet lived to see that not only were the heathen the objects of God's care but that children and even animals had their own place in the universal love. He was not to suppose that religion was only to be found in Israel. The Phœnician sailors with their prayers and their good-will would teach him better than that. In his stringent orthodoxy he learned slowly. Indeed, we are left in doubt as to whether he learned at all. But we have no doubt of the Father's patience with this fanatical, headstrong son, nor of the

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Divine Heart's yearning over everything It has created.

There was a man named Jonah the son of Amittai to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me."

To the true believer this opportunity given to the heathen to turn from their sin and be saved was extremely displeasing. Jonah rejected the mission, rising up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. In Italy and Spain he would be out of the Lord's jurisdiction, which was confined to Israel.

"Jonah rose up . . . and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish."

Yet he found that the Lord's jurisdiction extended farther than he had thought. "But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea,

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and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of these. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."

With sailors' superstition, they saw the storm as punishment for some one's crime, and drew lots for the detection of the criminal. The lot fell on Jonah.

"Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us? What is thine occupation? Whence comest thou?" . . .

"And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew;

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and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." . . .

"Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?" . . .

"And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you!"

The kindly sailors refused at first to take him at his word. "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not." Even when they seemed to have no choice but to act on Jonah's advice, they were torn between justice to themselves and duty by their passenger. "Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood." When they had taken up Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea had ceased from her raging, "Then the men

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feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows."

Humanity and piety are ascribed to Phœnicians, who were not only far from the true faith but worshipers of other gods. The inference seems to be that when every man cries unto his god, the cry must of necessity reach the Infinite and Universal, however little the individual knows about Him. It could not be that the rough good will and sincere, if mistaken, religion even of these sailors should be thrown away.

Then the author, in the free, inventive spirit of the *Midrash*, invokes the marvelous. And yet it is not the marvelous, since his point is simply that, however hard we may try to escape Him, God has all the means of His Almightiness to outwit us and bring us back.

"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

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It is important to notice here that there is no question of a whale or of any other natural species. God prepared the great fish. In other words, in God there are wonders of safety for those who trust in Him, or for those whose work is not yet done. In the spiritual history of men and women there are thousands of instances of deliverance from peril, not without their parallel with this one, and to which we apply the word "miraculous" for want of something more adequate. The "great fish" had its origin in the inventive resources of a writer who had not the same sense of humor which we have to-day; but it is a pity to let the outward form stand in the way of a great truth. The principle of God's protective care extended to the uttermost is one which the spiritually minded have as yet tested only partially; but it is at least a challenging thought to keep before the world.

It was perhaps to show protective care ex-

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tended to the uttermost that the "great fish" was imagined. The message is to those whose circumstances are desperate. Desperate as they are, the Lord has His resources. The question as to how the individual is to bring those resources into play on his own behalf is too large to deal with here; but this Book of Jonah raises it.

Out of his living pit Jonah prays to the Lord. "And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." That is to say, in the fulfillment of the divine purposes the most unlikely things can happen, and do happen frequently.

The active career of Jonah is again taken up, with a view to bringing out God's love of all His creatures in contrast with man's contempt for them.

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto

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Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee."

At the time of this writing Nineveh had long been in ruins, and the common knowledge of it was traditional. The Book of Jonah is one of the latest in time of all those in the Old Testament, perhaps the latest of all with the exception of that of Daniel, which also has certain *Midrash* qualities. Nineveh must therefore be explained.

"Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." That is, it would take a man three days to cross it on foot. "And Jonah began to enter the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

What happened next would strike us as improbable if historical accuracy were the aim of the *Midrash*. But it was not. It sweeps probability aside in order to get swiftly to its spiritual point.

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After one day's preaching by this unknown foreigner the whole population of the city, estimated as something like twelve hundred thousand, believed and repented. The king came off his throne and proclaimed a fast. In this fast the animals as well as men were to share, and they as well as men were exhorted to put up, in their dumb, undeveloped way, their prayer for mercy. It is significant that the name of the king is not given, nor is anything mentioned that could fix a date for so remarkable an occurrence. There is no reference to the splendor of the city—a wonder in the world—or to its commerce or its conquests. The author ignores all this because he sees nothing but God's relation to his creatures—men, women, children, animals—specially dear to Him because they have His gift of Life.

To get the force of the *Midrash* it must also be pointed out that the people of Nin-

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evenh, like the sailors of Joppa, had a religion which was not that of Israel. To the Hebrew they were cursed of Jehovah, and therefore of Jehovah's followers. The terms of the true Word of God are all the more, then, a rebuke to sectarian intolerance.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even unto the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed . . . saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God. . . ."

That the heathen should pray and receive grace was as incredible to the Hebrew as that the dim-hearted beasts should join in with

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them. Furthermore, that those outside the one true fold should be the recipients of mercy was distasteful to the orthodox monopoly of God.

“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.”

He had hoped to see the threatened evil come, and the city overthrown. Though he knew that its people were fasting and praying, he was sure that a heathen repentance could not do any good. But here was the city spared and an enemy of the true faith allowed to go on flourishing. His prayer of protest will be familiar to all devotees of any religion obliged to look on and see other religions blessed and prosperous.

“And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my saying,

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when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." He knew the Lord would be too kind. He would think too much of man as man, and not exclusively enough of Israel. The very fact of His calling a prophet to go to Nineveh suggested an indifference to heresy which the loyal Israelite could not but condemn. "For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Even then Jonah could not believe that the Jehovah whom he had trusted as the tribal deity of the Hebrew could really mean to befriend those who called God by another name and worshiped Him with other rites. He would retire and look on, waiting to see if his narrow faith would not be justified.

"So Jonah went out of the city . . . and

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there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, that he might see what would become of the city."

What follows between God and him approaches in compassion and tenderness the parable of the Prodigal Son. The Father does not punish this rebellious child, in whom creedal arrogance has killed genuine humanity, as well as the love that was afterward known as charity. On the contrary, He understands him, He deals with him gently, He gives him a further lesson, He appeals to his sense of fairness. He first *prepared*—the word is the same as that used of the "great fish"—a plant of the gourd family to come up over the booth, and Jonah was "exceeding glad" because of it. Apparently he loved it, doubtless for its shade and possibly for its beauty. But the next day, just as Jonah is rejoicing in his gourd, God *prepared* a worm which smote the plant that it withered. "And it came to

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pass, when the sun arose, that God *prepared* a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted." Again he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

On Jonah's disappointment over the loss of his plant the Father bases His appeal. It is a genuine appeal, like that of the father to the elder son in our Lord's parable. Jonah is not rebuked for his intolerance toward God and men; he is only asked to use his sense of justice.

"Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than a hundred and twenty thousand little children and also a great many animals?"

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That is all. The tale concludes with striking suddenness. We hear no more of Jonah, since his fate is not the subject of the *Midrash*. In setting forth the broad, un-national, unsectarian nature of the love of God, the essential truth has been expressed. The conclusion, with its emphasis on little children and the lowly beasts—"six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle" is the version of our English Old Testament—has a beauty of its own.

VI

If I have been prolix over this analysis it is to draw the contrast between the outer vehicle of the Word of God and the Word itself. The vehicle belongs to its time. What was the natural expression of one generation is perplexing to another. The "great fish," and the gourd which sprang up in one night and

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withered on the next, have so puzzled millions of readers that they have never lifted their eyes from the casket to look at the scroll within.

The Word of God, on the other hand, presents no difficulties. Once we have heard it we have no further doubt about it. While there might be, and doubtless have been, thousands of theories as to the gourd and the "great fish," there cannot, I think, be two opinions concerning the all-inclusiveness of God's love, set forth here with such artless picturesqueness. The same thing, I venture to believe, will be found true all through the Bible. It is an infallible Bible, but infallible in that purpose which it is designed to serve. Where the question is of the relations of God to man and of man to God, I am convinced that it never errs. All other questions, historical or scientific, are outside the scope of

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the Word of God. Their answers are given elsewhere.

This spiritual reading will be found more or less independent of both Modernist and Fundamentalist. I have given an interpretation of the Book of Jonah which might be called Modernist for the reason that it is guided by modern scholarship. But should anyone prefer to read the little work as a narrative of actual experience, the same truth will be there for him. The universality of God's care can be as apparent to the man who sees in the "great fish" a cachalot whale as it is to him who understands it as an invention for the uses of a *Midrash*.

This, I think, is true of all the vexed passages in Scripture. The spiritual meaning, simple and convincing, can be seen as detached from all extraneous circumstance. The extraneous circumstance can be matter of the most intense historic or antiquarian interest;

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but the Word of God is an eternal quality which frees itself from all that is the mere accident of Time, coming straight from Mind to mind.

IV

THE BIBLE AND DOGMA

CHAPTER IV

THE BIBLE AND DOGMA

I

ONE of the difficulties which the modern man must meet in his reading of the Bible arises from the necessity of viewing ideas essentially Hebraic through a Greco-Latin perspective. It is like turning a blue light on what should be seen in a white one. The atmosphere is changed. The reader's mind is charged with assumptions which were not in that of the writer. Not only are the original issues confused, but new issues are, in a measure, put in their place. It is no exaggeration to say that between the Christian thought of the twentieth century, largely

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Greco-Latin in its essence, and that of the New Testament, there is as wide a divergence as between the aspect of the streets of New York and that of Jerusalem or Pompeii. To reach the original intention we must make allowances for this substitution, this coloration, working our way behind it.

It is a fact that what we call the Christian Religion passed almost from its inception into Greco-Latin keeping and development. An evolution purely Hebraic up to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, it was Hellenized and Latinized in the course of two or three generations. By that operation it was moved from the basis on which it was placed at the beginning. What we call the Early Church was no longer the church of the Upper Room or of St. Paul's missionary gatherings. There is no indication in the New Testament that the Founder and His followers expected to separate from the He-

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brew body politic. The Master taught daily in the Temple; wherever the Apostles traveled they spoke in the synagogues first of all. Nothing but excommunication drove them to assemblies of their own.

It must be remembered that the word *ecclesia*, translated church, meant in the New Testament no more than an assembly. The elaborate senses we now attach to it must, in the main, be read into it through what we have developed in later times. Though the question is both too large and too involved to be discussed here, we may reasonably doubt if any such concept, or series of concepts, as we have worked out in the course of the Christian centuries was in the mind of either the Lord or the Apostles. Had it been their intention to establish a unit, or a phalanx of units, so complex as any of our churches has become, their teachings and writings must have rung with it. For the modern man the

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chances are that some particular church, with its formulas and passwords, stands in the forefront of all his thoughts of Christ. It is what he thinks of first. It is the Way, the Truth, the Life by which he must reach any other Way and Truth and Life, and through whose portals he must pass. That Christianity had a right to develop along these lines may be conceded, but that is not our theme. My only point is that to understand the Scriptures, even in their latest form we must see them as antedating the whole system of ecclesiastical politics which now rise up between the reader and the page.

As it is, the beaten path to that understanding is the one which the Greco-Latin has marked out for us. The fact is significant for the reason that in one special respect the difference between the Greco-Latin and the Hebrew mentality was radical.

The ruling characteristic of the Hebrew

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mind lay in the fact that its thought was vast, suggestive, poetic, but indefinite. Exactness was not part of its endowment. It threw out ideas but left them fluid and unfixed. The words of richest import in the Hebrew tongue are broad and deep, capable of many implications. They rarely crystallize. They state few thoughts with what Emerson calls "the solid angularity of facts." Neither the Old Testament or the New explains or delimits. Neither of them lays down anything like what we call a dogma. Neither of them draws up a creed. If they were analyzed they would be found to deal with very few principles, and these the most general and fundamental. God, righteousness, mercy, forgiveness, love! A list of such universal themes would soon exhaust them all. Even St. Paul, who is often called the doctrinal writer among those of the New Testament, is philosophical rather than dogmatic. Dogma must be read into him re-

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troactively. Had the Greco-Latin never developed dogma it would not be found in St. Paul's epistles. Creeds and doctrines, as we now understand these words, were alike outside the range of the Hebrew genius.

That genius, let me repeat, was for the vague and pregnant. It could never have produced such a document as, let us say, the Athanasian Creed with its presentation of God in terms almost geometric. It could not have given us the Westminster Confession, or that of the Council of Trent. The most sharply positive statement Jesus of Nazareth makes concerning God is that He is the Father. Even from that He leaves us to infer what we have the grace and power to infer. He enforces nothing. He repudiates verbal tests and merely formal adhesions. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father."

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His only test is in conduct. Conduct is the proof of faith. It is the standard of both the Testaments. Faith in God is one of the most potent of all the spiritual impulses; yet without being lived in practice it is dead. But once that faith in God *was* lived in practice, the Hebrew exactions came to an end. In speculative matters the individual's liberty of thinking for himself was not so much a conceded right as it was a matter of course.

Now the Greco-Latin mind, which almost at once took charge of Christianity, was the opposite of all this. It was clear, logical, definite. Above all, it was disputatious and dictatorial. It lived on argument. The history of Athens was that of its schools of discussion. To disembowel a subject till it yielded its last shred of significance was a mental sport. What the Greek thought out the Latin codified. They played into each other's hands, the Greek by laying bare the

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idea, the Latin by hardening it into a formula. Though they differed in gifts, their propensities were similar.

It must be noted, too, that outside the narrow circle of which Jerusalem was the center, the Greco-Latin civilization was that of the educated world. Though its focal points might shift from Athens and Rome to Constantinople and Alexandria, the spirit remained unchanged. The cultivation of North Africa was essentially European; so was that of Asia Minor. When I speak of the Greco-Latin, then, I speak of a sphere of influence, rather than in terms either ethnical or geographical.

The new ideas which Christianity brought to the centers of this European culture became at once the subject of the verbal wars in which Greeks, Latins, and all their disciples had come to delight. The time was opportune. Old topics, the very greatest, had

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been worn out by generations of dispute. There was nothing novel left to talk about, and to talk was an imperative social need. Without undervaluing whatever was sincere in some of the greatest conversions, it can hardly be doubted that the fascination of new subjects of debate was powerful. Though we can hardly suppose that anyone ever became a Christian because of the freshness of the themes which Christianity presented, yet the freshness of the themes was an attraction. On those themes the Greco-Latin convert fell like a starving animal on its victim. The Christian literature of the first three or four centuries shows an appetite for talk both voracious and insatiate.

Where, too, the old themes had been discussed in select academies, the new were the topics of all classes of society. For the educated Greco-Latin Christian nothing was too abstract, nothing too far removed for human

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pursuit to follow after. The God whom the Hebraic Scriptures had held as indefinable and indescribable was tracked beyond time, beyond His relations with man, into the deepest recesses of His relations with Himself. It was a realm in which the Greco-Latin mind exulted, and from the inner conclaves of the learned the sport spread outward to the multitude.

Doctrines which we ourselves sometimes consider too sacred to mention outside a church were, among the Christians of the Roman Empire, the themes of ribald songs in circuses and of drunken debates in wineshops. A favorite topic was the composition of the Trinity, and the method by which the Son was born of the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeded from them both. "Every corner, every alley of the city," Neander quotes from Gregory of Nyssa, a bishop of the fourth century, "was full of these discussions—the

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streets, the market-places, the drapers, the banks, the victuallers. Ask a man, 'How many oboli?' He answers by dogmatizing on generated and ungenerated being. Inquire the price of bread, and you are told, 'The Son is subordinate to the Father.' Ask if the bath is ready, and you are informed, 'The Son was created out of nothing.'” The quotation is given merely to illustrate the passion with which the Greco-Latin gave himself up to verbal contention; for out of this tendency grew whatever we know as dogma or the science of theology.

The Bible is Hebraic; theology is European. It is European in spirit whether its protagonists spring from Italy, Byzantium, or North Africa. The churches, therefore, are European too. They are Greco-Latin rather than Hebraic in their origin. They sprang, for the most part, out of the Greco-Latin instinct for discussion. Had a multi-

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tude of questions which the sacred writers seem never to have dreamed of not been raised, it is possible that our lamentable schisms might never have come about. As it is, the Greco-Latin intellect with its imperious will to dispute, to docket, to classify, to codify, dominates most of our Christian thinking.

Taking the Greco-Latin church as the first to emerge with strong self-assertion from obscurity, most of our Protestant bodies may be seen as variants on this model. All show traces of their inheritance. They have the same habits, tastes, and methods. Leaving the Greek Church out of the discussion as remote from us Americans, our other denominations can be seen as true blood-relatives of the Church of Rome. To this statement the Society of Friends, the Christian Science Church, and a few other cults of less importance may be taken as exceptions; but the great historic communions—Anglican, Bap-

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tist, Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian—differ from their Roman prototype in details rather than in essence. None in spirit goes back beyond the methods evolved after an Hebraic religion had already passed under Greco-Latin guardianship. None reverts to the simple suggestiveness, with full liberty of private judgment, which can easily be seen as the staple of the Old and New Testaments. All are dogmatic, in the spirit of the fourth and fifth centuries. On touchstones of dogma most of them found admission to their membership. For lapses from dogma most of them would excommunicate. Faith, as a test, has been swung from its place as faith in God, where the Hebrew had been content to leave it, to that of a conditional principle as faith in a set of formulas. Against most of our churches the charge might be brought that the set of formulas has been made more important than God. Each contends that God can be

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found most easily by its own particular prescription. As a matter of fact, a choice between sets of formulas is what is chiefly offered to mankind by the churches of to-day, while there is something like an assumption that you can hardly be reckoned as a Christian without selecting one of them.

The fact is stressed because it is so vitally Greco-Latin. It is a legacy from that past of which the dead hand still controls so many of our thoughts and actions. In the Old and New Testaments there is little, if anything at all, that resembles it. It is not, in my judgment, a real part of religion, since religion grew in the hearts of men and produced Jesus Christ entirely without it. Rather, it is racial and cultural, but of another race than that from which the Master sprang, and of a culture different from the one which gave Him the Apostles.

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II

Is dogma, then, to be deplored?

The question is often asked. The answer is so often given that it is to be deplored, and given without much reflection, that a few words from one far from dogmatic by temperament may not be wholly presumptuous.

In the first place, there is nothing to be gained by quarreling with the course which history has taken. If Christianity, after springing from a Hebrew source, has become to all intents and purposes a Greco-Latin religion, there is doubtless some good reason for the transmutation. Having become a Greco-Latin religion, it was bound also to become a dogmatic religion, since the European mind would not have had it otherwise. To fall in with this is merely common sense. Most of the churches being dogmatic, we can

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only suppose that they know the conditions necessary to their purposes. The individual who objects to their methods is no longer compelled to subscribe to their creeds.

For the fact remains that the vast majority of those who can accept Christianity at all prefer to accept it dogmatically. Notwithstanding the rebellion which the last half-century has raised against dogma, it still prevails over all forms of undogmatic religion. It may even be said that only a small proportion of the spiritually-minded *want* an undogmatic religion or would know what to do with it. For the enormous mass of Christians in Europe and America a faith in which all the i's are dotted and all the t's crossed would seem to be the only one that can, even remotely, be assimilated or understood. That is what dogma means; an explanation so obvious that the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot misinterpret it. It is a saving of trou-

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ble. Very few people will take the pains to think for themselves. Very few are capable of thinking for themselves, even if they take the pains. It must never be forgotten that the message of the Master came to an undeveloped race, and that the race, after two thousand years, is only slightly more advanced than it was when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea.

For the childish mind anything serious whatever must be made so plain that there is no mistaking it. That, apparently, is what the teachers of the church in the early centuries undertook to do. Not to have done it would have been to leave the Christian religion to the uproar of irresponsible tongues. It is probable that without the strong hand of the Roman Church, the Christianity of the early ages would have drifted into a wild sectarianism even more disastrous than the disunion and eccentricity of the present day. For

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a people of Greco-Latin tendencies some amount of definition was the only course. They were not the Hebraic people, with an inherited awe of a Holy of Holies into which no man dared force his way. They were an excitable, audacious populace of disputants, only to be kept in order by autocratic decree. The refusal of such decree would have meant the folly and confusion of the Christian world.

The same thing would be true to-day. Were the churches to lift their restraints of dogma it would soon be seen that the Christian mind is not yet ready for such freedom. Since we must take human nature as it is, we must take it with its limitations. Among the first of those limitations is the average man's disability as to knowing what to think. He is always under tutelage. That tutelage is exercised now by the press, now by the politician, now by the force of a standardized public opinion, and largely by the churches. In the

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United States as much as in any other country, the churches sway, and often for good, a huge percentage of minds that would otherwise be lost amid pros and cons with which they are incapable of dealing. Control by the church in such countries as Spain and French-Canada is often the subject of comment; but scarcely less stringent is the similar control in important sections of the United States. Though in one case the control is Catholic and in the other Protestant, the principle is the same.

Without a strongly dogmatic system this leadership would be impossible. It seems necessary for the Christian world in its present stage of progress to be divided into groups each with its watchwords. The watchwords serve a purpose. Like political slogans, they concentrate thoughts which would otherwise be scattered through the wildness of much speaking. Dogmas do the same. A world without the signposts of dogma might come

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to know something of God and be a better world than this one, but at present we have not got it. *What seems to be true* is the first meaning our best-known Greek lexicon gives for the word "dogma," and an authority able to point out *what seems to be true* cannot be other than a useful one.

Whether or not it is wise for the churches to make binding on the conscience of its members what only seems to be true, is still another question; but there again they presumably know their own business. If to fulfill the functions they elect to serve, they make it a rule that the individual must subscribe to their doctrines or give up their fellowship, no one can contest their right. To raise public outcry when this is done is not only foolish; it is indefensible. No one compels a man to be a Presbyterian, an Anglican, or a Catholic. If he chooses to be so enrolled he should surely be true to the terms of his enrollment.

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To call himself a Catholic, an Anglican, or a Presbyterian, and then appeal to public clamor to support him in being something else, is an outrage to liberty of conscience. The Presbyterian, the Anglican, the Catholic, the dogmatist of any denomination whatever has the same freedom to make his rules as the Elk, the Freemason, and the Oddfellow. There are ways open to every man of believing and preaching what he likes; but in a world divided into camps, and to which at present the camp system is so dear, marching with one troop while carrying the banner of another must surely be an act of treachery.

III

What it comes to, it seems to me, is the right of the individual. There are those who possess what we may call the Greco-Latin temperament, who demand definitions, who seek

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a clearly marked course which they have no choice but to follow. With a religion which did not provide them with this they would be unhappy. There are not only individuals of whom this is true; there are nations and races. Nearly all the Southern-European peoples have this spiritual submission in their blood, and nearly all the Celts. Socially and politically, too, they are subjects of group-consciousness rather than fiercely independent personalities. Just as in any Celtic or Latin country the clan, the sept, or the family will be found to dominate the man, so among them, too, dogma delivered from above, with a ritual to express it, will overbear the tendency toward thinking for themselves. For those who by racial make-up are inclined this way there must be a legitimate place in a system so generous as Christ's.

On the other hand there are those who are not inclined this way, and to whom the cell

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built by walls of dogma is nothing but a prison. A large part of the struggle always going on within what we call the Christian Church gets its incitement from the dogmatist's effort to control those to whom dogma is abhorrent. Among all races, even among the Celts and the South Europeans, there are those who need to be free, who insist on seeking truth along the lines on which they themselves best know how to pursue it. There are also races and nations among whom this instinct is imperative.

It may be pointed out here that the Anglo-Saxon race especially has long been recognized as having a natural affinity with the Hebraic mind. It is, I think, a fact that of all the modern languages English alone has some of the large suggestiveness of the Hebrew. It is the least conjugated of the European tongues, the least exact, and yet the richest in overtones and implications. It is prob-

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ably for this reason that English translations of the Bible have been considered to reflect most fully the spirit of the original. Each medium has the same broad comprehensive-ness, not too positive, not delimited. Each is pregnant with idea and yet each is restrained by a reserve which is not Greco-Latin. Where everything is not said in words there is always the wider latitude for thinking.

The wider latitude for thinking possibly makes the Anglo-Saxon "heretical" by instinct. It is well to remember here just what is implied by "heretical." "Heresy" meant at first no more than the power of choosing for oneself. Not till the ages of the great Christian controversies was a sinister significance attached to the word. Only in proportion as faith was wrested from God to be applied to formulas did the act of choosing for oneself become first an offense, and later a crime for which no punishment was too

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terrible. But to this crime the Anglo-Saxon race has always been predisposed. The English mind in particular is notoriously restive to dictation. Whether in politics, adventure, or religion its bent is to choose for itself. Choosing for itself, it has rarely failed to recognize the right of others to choose for themselves, and so has evolved the notable English capacity for compromise.

If I had a plea to make, which I have not, it would be for some degree of compromise between the Christian "dogmatist" and the equally Christian "heretic." By compromise I do not mean that either should relax his principles, but that each should grant to the other an acknowledged place in the scheme of things. The "dogmatist" might remember that the purest religion ever known, that which centered round the visible presence of the Master, existed before there was dogma of any kind. On his side the "heretic" might

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recall the fact that, had dogma never been proclaimed, there might not now be any Christian religion in the world. All I should beg is the recognition of something which seems self-evident: that what is good for one is not of necessity good for another, and that each should be free to follow his own bent.

IV

Here it may not be amiss to speak of an episode in the New Testament which presents the most obvious difficulties to the American man-in-the-street. It is perhaps the more permissible to do this since the episode often inspires in the press sensational headlines not unsuggestive of the earlier quoted words of Gregory of Nyssa. I mean the story which embodies what is commonly called the Virgin Birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

The subject is naturally vast for a few

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paragraphs; and yet what I have to say of it can be put into few words.

First of all, in considering God or anything Divine, I start from the fact that we human creatures, whether as individuals or as churches, know of the Being of God nothing whatever. We are ignorant of what He is like and of what He consists in. His Name is more often on our lips than that of any other entity, and yet of what constitutes His Entity there is not the smallest single detail which of our own experience we can affirm. In this respect the Bible gives us no help in either of its Testaments. On the contrary, it clings on this subject to the deepest possible reticence. If it did not cling to this reticence it would lay itself open to suspicion.

“No man,” St. John writes, “hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath de-

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clared Him.” But He has not described Him. He has spoken of Him as Spirit, but of Spirit He has given us none of the textures, or tissues, or component parts. All we can know of God is what we are able to infer.

This inference extends only to His qualities. From the past experience of mankind, supported by some personal proof of our own, we come to the conclusion that He is eternal, almighty, and infinitely loving. To sum up these and many other attributes, the Master found the words “Heavenly Father.” This being as far as even He could go, He left the whole subject there.

There, I feel sure, the Hebraic mind would have left it too. There, I think, the Nordic—and especially the Anglo-Saxon—mind would have left it. But not so the Greco-Latin. It cannot be irreverent to presume that had it not been for the Greco-Latin’s glee in dialectic, no questions as to the exact rela-

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tions of the Father to the Son, and of the Father and the Son to the Holy Ghost—transcending as they do all human thought—would ever have come up. From contemporaneous history of the days when these were living popular issues we do not gather that they were inspired by devotion or by what is known as zeal for God. Rather, they seem to have been raised by the avidity for debate, for hunting a given concept to the last extremity, which was the ruling passion of the time. The assemblies in which these issues were fought to a finish were not, as we sometimes suppose, consecrated gatherings of saints waiting to be moved by the Holy Spirit. They have been aptly called “pitched battles.” These battles were fought along the lines of a general election in England, or a life-and-death struggle between Republicans and Democrats in America. Not only did the spoils belong to the victors, but the defeated

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went down to exile, ignominy, death. There was hardly any fury of revenge too savage for the partisans of a conquering doctrine to exult in.

None the less, certain decisions were reached in this way which an immense majority of Christians have accepted. To remain a Christian and yet to dissent from that majority is to take on oneself a degree of responsibility not easily borne by a single individual. We are bound to admit that the mission of the churches is the highest we know anything about. We must also admit that, allowing for the shortcomings due to human nature, that mission on the whole is nobly carried out. To break with this great tradition is a grave step for anyone to take; and we break with it when we deny the teaching of which the least we can say is that centuries have hallowed it. Were there no truth in it at all, we can feel reasonably sure that in

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the course of these centuries the churches would have found it out.

At the same time, to follow the churches into their analysis of God is not possible for every man, and I, as an individual, have ceased to make this attempt. My Nordic, or Anglo-Saxon, mind does not permit me to enter into holy places which I cannot tread. I feel myself at liberty to stand away. I stand away in awe and, I hope, in reverence. If others feel the power to go on and fathom the depths of the Being of God, let them go. It is not for me to stop them or to tell them that they have no such capacity. When I know that I have no such capacity I know all that I can assert.

This attitude, given the bewildering conditions of our time, seems to me a legitimate one. If the churches teach what I cannot understand, I can at least incline before them with honor and respect. If they know what

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I do not know, I see no merit in contradicting them. If they claim to know more than what seems to me possible for anyone to know on earth, that is their business and not mine. Mine is to know what I can know myself. Beyond that the better part is silence.

V

In this way I stand off with awe and reverence from what is known as the Virgin Birth. With a sense of the supreme beauty of the idea, I shrink from discussing it, even in my own thought. I see nothing to be gained by doing so. I would not lose the first three chapters of the Gospel According to St. Luke for a large part of the literature of the world. I doubt if many people would so lose it. Merely as one of the loveliest episodes ever related to man, the story of the Babe of Bethlehem is without a parallel.

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Were I asked if I believed it to be true I could only reply that I do not know what possibilities are open to Almightyness. I do not know what natural laws lie beyond the very few of such laws which up to 1924 have come under our observation. It is certain that within a generation we have with our mortal eyes seen things come easily to pass that we supposed to be out of all question. Matter has been reduced to a tenuity not very different from spirit, while the boundaries of the finite have been removed and removed again till it almost melts into the infinite. How can we say that this could not happen or that could not happen when we do not know?

Personally, I have no difficulty in thinking that a human being might come into the world by some other process than the one we know as generation. The religions of the East and the classical mythologies have many traces

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of the tradition. Far from tending to discredit the possibility, these legendary vestiges incline me to think that there may have been some prehistoric knowledge on the subject which we of to-day have lost. In any case, God has too many forms of Self-manifestation for me to say which are within His power and which are not. I am able, therefore, to stand at a humble distance from the Manger of Bethlehem or to kneel with the Sages and offer my gold, frankincense, and myrrh without too many Greco-Latin questions or too much introspection. This is not a case of ignorance being bliss; it is one of the Socratic aphorism that no one knows anything till he knows that he knows nothing.

There is this also to be said: that while the Virgin Birth may be questioned as a physical or historical fact, it is too late to uproot it from the hearts of Christendom. There are facts of beauty as well as of history; facts

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of poetry as well as those of natural law. Truth cannot always be measured by a yardstick. Beauty can be Truth just as Truth can be Beauty. There is a wisdom of God as well as a wisdom of Men. The wisdom of Men has to sift and weigh and speculate; the wisdom of God is large and bold, filling the universe with wonders.

Wherever the Evangelist St. Luke got his information, he drew it from the sources of the loveliest things ever conceived of by man. No such story as his had ever before been told to human ears. There is no single detail in which he does not touch, in one and the same act, the highest sublimity and the deepest, simplest human tenderness.

His very words are music: "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's

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name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women! . . . The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. . . . And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. . . . And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this

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shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

This narrative has been accepted as the Truth wherever men's hearts have opened to the appeal of the Infant Jesus. It may stand for Truth beyond all our known facts, and as to which our known facts are but broken reflections. I do not know. I do not know what St. Luke means when he says that "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee." The Church may explain it to me in doctrines of the Incarnation, and yet my spirit stands aloof. Another man's spirit may press forward and assimilate all that the Church has beaten out through its centuries of discussion.

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For me it is enough to know that somehow, somewhere, it has been demonstrated in one great act of Love and Beauty that God and man are caught up together in a single community of being.

Something like this—to be expressed in as many ways as there are men and women to express it—the Christian world has taken as the starting point of its faith. The stable at Bethlehem, the Babe in the manger, the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, the trooping angels singing “Gloria in Excelsis! Peace on earth! Good will toward men!”—these are visions of Beauty and Truth which the Christian cannot and never will let go.

And lest I should seem to base this clinging to tradition on grounds of sentiment only, let me add that there is no authority on earth—however scholarly, however scientific—with the right to assert that St. Luke’s narra-

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tive of the birth of Jesus is not true. There are learned men who can reason against it, who can call it improbable, who can, to their own satisfaction, trace the methods by which it grew as a charming legend, and who themselves may disbelieve it and refuse to teach it. But that is as far as they can go. They cannot prove that it never happened. The simplest Christian who believes that it did happen has as much right on his side as they can have on theirs. At its most radical point the question must still remain an open one. It lies in that region where the heart has reasons which the reason cannot know, but which none the less have their validity. To dogmatize against the narrative of St. Luke is at least as Greco-Latin as to dogmatize in its favor, and probably more dangerous. The Hebrew mind, and in many ways the modern mind at large, would rather wonder and wait, standing outside with

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the angels who frankly acknowledge that there are holy places where they fear to tread.

VI

After all, in spiritual things of which we know so little, why be too vigorous in denial? Denial is our greatest danger since it shuts the mind. So long as the mind is open the spirit is receptive. With a closed mind the life becomes narrowed and new ideas are brought to it in vain.

Not without an immense significance did Goethe make his Mephistopheles describe himself in the words: "I am the Spirit that Denies—*Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint.*" The Spirit that Denies is perhaps the most subtle of all the anti-human, anti-progressive forces. It is the fanatic, schismatic factor in the history of churches, the instinct that brings enmities, persecutions, wars into the

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life of man. In private experience it creates the bigot, the talebearer, and the generally hateful member of society. Rising as it does within every man, our only defense is to choke it.

There is a sense in which what we deny is a surer index to our characters than what we affirm. What we affirm concerns ourselves only; what we deny concerns others. When I recite my own creed I am responsible for myself alone; when I deny another man's creed I become in a measure responsible for him. In this way we violate liberty of conscience and rouse resentments and hostilities.

If the Bible is anything at all it is the charter of a vast religious freedom. By freedom I mean the right of any man to believe what he can grasp, and to progress as he is able. If he is far behind what the churches teach—as many are, and as I confess I am myself—it simply means that he has that much ground

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to cover before he catches up. The important thing is to make what we do understand a possession. There was an undogmatic religion before there was a dogmatic one. Where both have merits, the individual, it seems to me, must be free to choose from both in the degree which best helps him to know God.

THE END

